

30 January 1984

CAMPAIGN '84/  
LA ROUCHE

BROKAW: A different kind of cult is growing strong in America, one centered on a political rather than a religious ideology. The cult is wrapped around a man named Lyndon La Rouché. Back in the late '60s, La Rouché went by the name of Lynn Marcus, and his politics were extremely left-wing; well, now he's on the right, the far right. And as Bryan Ross tells us in tonight's 'Special Segment,' La Rouché is using a kind of political nastiness that hasn't been seen in America in some time.

ROSS: This is Wilmette, Ill., a suburb of Chicago. Late last year, something very ugly happened on this block. Someone started a smear campaign against this young woman, 22-year-old Marcie \*Permuth. The smear was that Marcie Permuth was a prostitute, a call girl, operating out of her parents' home. MARCIE PERMUT: They put fliers on all of the windshields and all the cars just in this block, and then the very next day the same flier was put in the mail.

ROSS: Marcie Permuth works as a researcher in the news room at Channel 5, the NBC station in Chicago, and the smear campaign against her began the day after she started gathering information about the political activities of this man, \*Lyndon La Rouché. LYNDON LA ROUCHE (TV Interview): The British are far more evil than Adolf Hitler.

ROSS: In Baltimore, the same kind of thing. Baltimore Sun Reporter Mark \*Arax started work on a story about Lyndon La Rouché, and he became the target of smears and threats. MARK ARAX (Journalist): It was distressing, and it was particularly frightening to my wife.

ROSS: And when NBC News began to prepare this report on Lyndon La Rouché, the threatening phone calls at home came quickly. FEMALE VOICE OF TELEPHONE ANSWERING MACHINE: We are watching you. We know who you are. We know where you go. We've been following you for a month.

ROSS: The anonymous phone calls, the threats, the smear campaigns are believed to come out of this building in New York City, where La Rouché and his followers are building a kind of political cult that seems to be well-organized, well-financed, and growing in influence. TELEVISION COMMERCIAL: To support the La Rouché campaigns, call...

ROSS: Just this month La Rouché bought himself a half hour on CBS to launch what he says is his campaign for president. LA ROUCHE: If I were president of the United

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States at this moment, I would have to crank this thing up and say, 'I may be fighting a war as of March.'

ROSS: La Rouché campaigns against what he sees as a web of world conspiracies--British conspiracies, Jewish conspiracies, Soviet KGB conspiracies--and once La Rouché lays out a conspiracy, his hundreds of followers (Film graphic: "La Rouché says, 'Send Kissinger to the Moon.'"), familiar figures at many airports, spread the word of their leader. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: The media is KGB, and so is that liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

ROSS: The latest La Rouché conspiracy is a Walter Mondale conspiracy, and La Rouché followers have been stalking Mondale, disrupting his campaign appearances and getting into fights with Mondale campaign workers. \*AVID ROSEN: They're extremists in three-piece suits.

ROSS: Avid Rosen of the Anti-defamation League says that among La Rouché's extremist teachings is that a Jewish conspiracy is responsible for drug smuggling and even the Holocaust. ROSEN: He, or at least his writers, have gone so far as to say that Jews in some way or other were responsible for the Holocaust by cooperating with the Nazis; he's capable of statements like that.

ROSS: Despite his ugly teachings and tactics, the La Rouché cult is growing and in some circles gaining a measure of acceptance. At membership meetings around the country, like this one in New Jersey, there are good turnouts. People sit for hours to hear what La Rouché speakers have to say, and the well written and slickly printed La Rouché newspapers and magazines sell well, reportedly bringing in \$2 million a year to the cult. Last year in more than a dozen states, the La Rouché cult ran some 600 candidates for local office, and a few actually were elected. In organized labor, members of the La Rouché cult provided intelligence reports to Teamster President Jackie Presser in the early 1980s after cult groups spied on Teamster groups which opposed Presser. And in Washington at the daily press briefings, along with the reporters from the networks and the wire services, there's almost always a La Rouché cult member who says he, too, is a member of the press. (Film clip: Protest.) VOICE OF UNIDENTIFIED PROTESTER: The NBC hag. That's 'cause (Inaudible)...

ROSS: The members of the La Rouché cult seem to be having a good time playing with the American system, attacking a big television network, disrupting a major political campaign, smearing people who ask questions about them, trying to scare off reporters. In the year 1984, this man, Lyndon La Rouché has worked very hard and spent a lot of money to put together a political cult that specializes in nastiness and organized hate. Brian Ross, NBC News, New York.